

NEC BRIEFING

3 JANUARY 1957

## NEW SYRIAN CABINET

- I. Composition of new Asali cabinet--announced 31 Dec--is a clear victory for Syrian leftists. Composition of cabinet is responsibility of Syria's president Qawatli, veteran chameleon who spent several years in exile in Egypt. Although Qawatli had assured Syrian conservative elements that he would name a conservative to form his next cabinet he was too weak or unwilling to keep his word.
- A. Populists (largest bloc in Parliament) not represented at all.
- B. Five of the eleven-man cabinet are members of Khalid al-Asm's parliamentary bloc.
1. al-Asm (both acting defense minister and a "minister of state"--i.e. without portfolio) is virulently anti-Western, pro-Egyptian and friendly toward USSR.
  2. Said on 28 Dec USSR had "proved itself" friend to Arabs, US had not.
  3. Syria's leftward drift picked up speed in '55, when al-Asm was foreign minister: we can expect to hear more of this firebrand.
- C. Two others are leaders in left-wing ASRP.
- D. Of remaining three cabinet members, only one, Hameen Kuzbari (minister of justice and acting minister of labor and social affairs) is rightist with long record of opposition to left. Kuzbari is favored candidate of conservative army group for premiership: his cabinet position is probably a sop to this group.

25 YEAR  
RE-REVIEW

E. We expect new cabinet to repeat, in a still more leftward direction, performance of previous Asali governments.

II. First chance for a leftist field day may come when large number of conservative Syrian army officers and politicians--including son of a former president--come up for trial over alleged UK-Iraqi plot against Syria (involving arms smuggling from Iraq to the Druze tribes in southeastern Syria).

25X1

**IV. Effect of new cabinet on Syria's two major Arab neighbors, Iraq and Jordan, could well be serious.**

**A. Iraqis will see new cabinet as still another step in isolation of Iraq from rest of Arabs.**

**1. While Huri has internal security situation in hand at moment, future developments in Syria (especially, forthcoming trial of plotters) could set off new demonstrations.**

**B. Effect in Jordan may be to accelerate nation's trip down same leftward path as Syria.**

**1. Ominous parallels between recent events in Syria and Jordan-- purges of pro-Western civil servants, parliamentary requests for closer relations with Bloc, more impetus behind moves for Soviet military aid.**

**V. Turkey's probable reaction to Syria's new cabinet will be increased concern over Syria's pro-Soviet orientation.**

**A. The Turkish government will become more insistent that some direct multilateral action must ultimately be taken to alter current Syrian trends.**

**B. Turks will probably continue to strengthen defensive position on their 500 mile border with Syria.**

**C. Ankara will probably press the US for increased military assistance.**

**Page Denied**